

## HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive is issued to implement the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Professional Scholarship Program (HPSP). **AUTHORITY:** Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C) 7601 through 7619, 7633, 7634 and 7636.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CHANGES:** This Directive sets forth the policy for VHA to implement HPSP.
- 3. RELATED ISSUES:** HPSP was established by Congress on August 26, 1980, by Public Law (P. L.) 46-330; re-authorized on May 5, 2010, through December 31, 2014, by Section 603 of P. L. 111-163, The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Service Act of 2010; and extended until December 31, 2019, by Section 302 of P. L. 113-146, Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. It is codified at 38 , U.S.C. 7601 through 7619, 7633, 7634, and 7636.
- 4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** HR Development, Retention and Policy is responsible for the contents of this VHA Directive. Questions may be referred to Scholarships & Clinical Services at 504-565-4901.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.
- 6. RECERTIFICATION:** This VHA Directive is scheduled for recertification on or before the last working day of 2016.

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## HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

**1. PURPOSE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive implements the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Professional Scholarship Program (HPSP).

**AUTHORITY:** Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 7601 through 7619, 7633, 7634, and 7636. **NOTE:** *The Secretary of Veterans Affairs has delegated authority to the Under Secretary for Health to issue regulations implementing the Health Professionals Education Assistance Program (HPEAP), 38 U.S.C. Chapter 76, in accordance with 38 U.S.C. 501, 512, and 7421. The Under Secretary for Health has delegated authority to implement and administer the Health Professional Scholarship Program (HPSP) component of HPEAP to the VHA Office of Workforce Management and Consulting.*

### 2. BACKGROUND

a. Congress established HPSP on August 26, 1980, under Public Law (P.L.) 46-330. The original authority for HPSP expired on December 31, 1998. HPSP was re-authorized through December 31, 2014, by Section 603 of P.L. 111-163, The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Service Act of 2010, and extended through December 31, 2019, by Section 302 of P.L. 113-146, Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. It is codified in 38 U.S.C. 7601 through 7619, 7633, 7634, and 7636.

b. The purpose of HPSP is to award scholarships to students receiving education or training in a direct or indirect health-care services discipline, and to assist in providing an adequate supply of such personnel for VA and the United States. HPSP helps VHA meet its need for qualified health care professionals for which recruitment or retention is difficult and for health care occupations determined to be of high priority in workforce succession planning. HPSP authorizes VA to provide for the payment of a monthly stipend, tuition, allowable fees, and other reasonable educational expenses, including books and necessary equipment. HPSP will help VA meet its need for qualified healthcare staff by obligating scholarship recipients to complete a service obligation at a VA healthcare facility after graduation and licensure or certification.

**3. POLICY:** It is VHA policy to re-establish and implement HPSP. VHA will award HPSP scholarships only in qualifying fields of education or training leading to employment as an appointee under 38 U.S.C. 7401 (1), (3), or as designated by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

### 4. RESPONSIBILITIES:

a. **VHA Workforce Management and Consulting (WMC) Office.** The Workforce Management and Consulting Office is responsible for allocating adequate resources to implement, manage, and administer HPSP requirements.

(1) **HR Development, Retention and Policy.** The Assistant Chief Officer (ACO), HR Development, Retention and Policy Healthcare is responsible for implementing and managing HPSP nationally. This includes, but is not limited to, policy development and implementation, funding allocation, program oversight, and program evaluation. Other specific responsibilities of the ACO include:

(a) Ensuring annually, that occupation and participant selection give priority to applicants pursuing a course of education or training toward a career in an occupation for which the Inspector General of the Department has, in the most current determination published in the Federal Register pursuant to 38 U.S.C. 7412(a), determined that there is one of the largest staffing shortages throughout the Department with respect to such occupations determined by VHA.

(b) Publicizing the scholarship program throughout the United States.

(c) Publishing a Program Guide, which at a minimum includes a fair summary of a participant's rights, responsibilities, and liabilities.

(d) Establishing Selection Committees in collaboration with subject matter experts from applicable program offices and field/facility hiring officials.

(e) Reviewing and approving Selection Committee recommendations based on the availability of funds.

(f) Ensuring participants are informed of program mobility requirements and complete a mobility agreement upon scholarship acceptance.

(g) Administering funding for HPSP, subject to the availability of appropriated funds for such purpose, and ensuring procedures are in place to account for how appropriated funds are obligated.

(h) Ensuring participants perform clinical tours at a VA health care facility as determined by VA while the participants are enrolled in the course of education or training for which the scholarship is provided.

(i) Providing procedures for managing program data collection, maintenance, storage, and reporting.

(j) Monitoring participants to ensure applicable credentials are obtained in a minimal amount of time following graduation.

(k) Collaborating with local facilities to select, appoint, or assign participants under VA hiring guidelines, to a position for which the degree prepared the participant as soon as possible, but no later than 90 days after the date that the participant receives his or her degree, or the date the participant obtains any required applicable credentials, whichever is later.

(l) Collaborating with local facilities to ensure participants are assigned mentors employed in the same facility where the participant performs his or her period of obligated service.

(m) Notifying participants, when selected for a position to fulfill the HPSP service obligation, of the work assignment and its location no later than 60 days before the date on which the participant must begin work.

(n) Monitoring and tracking participant service obligation completion.

(o) Processing requests for waiver or suspension of any obligation for service or payment incurred under HPSP.

(p) Ensuring debt collection procedures are initiated if the individual fails to satisfy the requirements of the HPSP Agreement.

(1) **National Healthcare Recruitment Service.** The National Healthcare Recruitment Service is responsible for assisting HR Development, Retention and Policy in identifying anticipated workforce needs based on strategic workforce planning; participating in identifying and selecting high potential applicants; assisting participants within 6 months of graduation with identifying and preparing for suitable job placement; and collaborating with VHA facilities to identify placement opportunities for program participants. In addition, National Healthcare Recruitment Service is responsible for marketing and outreach strategies that target potential HPSP applicants. These strategies include implementing VHA national media marketing initiatives and publicizing the scholarship program to educational institutions throughout the United States.

(2) **Recruiting & Staffing Services (R&SS).** Recruiting & Staffing Services is responsible for assisting Scholarship & Clinical Education Services in developing and posting HPSP program announcements via USAJOBS, accepting application packages, performing the initial screening of applicants, issuing certificates of eligibility, and performing background investigations for applicants recommended by the Selection Committees.

(3) **Finance and Business Operations Services (FBOS).** Finance and Business Operations Services is responsible for providing financial operations support in administering HPSP budget allocations and processing payment obligations related to HPSP participants. Also, FBOS is responsible for allocating adequate resources to support HPSP requirements and is responsible for obligating and processing certified invoices for HPSP participants, issuing bills of collection, and forwarding unresolved participant debts to the Debt Management Center for final resolution.

(4) **Financial Services Center.** The Financial Services Center is responsible for vendorizing HPSP participants and educational institutions and timely processing participant tuition, fee, and stipend payments.

(5) **Debt Management Center.** The Debt Management Center is responsible for collecting debts resulting from participation in HPSP.

(6) **Office of Patient Care Services.** The Office of Patient Care Services will assign applicable program offices to assist WMC annually in conducting participant selections. Program offices assigned are responsible for:

(a) identifying subject matter experts and field/facility hiring officials for selection committee membership;

- (b) participating on the HPSP selection committee to identify and select high potential applicants;
- (c) assisting WMC with preparing participants within 6 months of graduation for suitable job placement; and
- (d) collaborating with WMC and VHA facilities to identify placement opportunities for program participants.

d. **Selection Committee.** The HPSP selection committee will consist of a collaboration of subject matter experts, field/facility hiring officials, and program offices. The selection committees will:

- (1) assist in developing the selection criteria and guidelines for selecting scholarship participants at differing education or training levels;
- (2) review application packages and recommend primary applicants for final approval;
- (3) ensure selection of applicants are based on merit without regard to race, sex, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, and status as a parent; and
- (4) ensure applicants recommended for selection meet all eligibility requirements, have demonstrated a high likelihood that they will be successful in completing their education and training, and that they will be successful in employment in such field.

e. **Facility Directors.** Facility Directors are responsible for working with WMC representatives and using VA hiring guidelines to select, appoint, or assign HPSP participants once participants are eligible for selection, appointment, or assignment to a position in the occupation for which HPSP prepared the participants.

(1) Facility Directors shall make every effort to provide clinical tour opportunities for HPSP participants.

(2) As soon as possible after participants meet eligibility requirements, Facility Directors will:

- (a) in the case of participants who are not full-time employees in the VHA, use VA hiring guidelines to select or appoint such participants as such employees;
- (b) in the case of participants who are employees in the VHA but are not serving in positions for which such participants' course of education or training prepared such participants, use VA hiring guidelines to assign such participants to such positions; and
- (c) ensure at the commencement of the period of obligated service, participants are assigned mentors employed in the same facility where participants perform such service.

f. **Human Resources Management Officers.** Human Resource Management (HRM) Officers will provide assistance in carrying out the provisions of 38 U.S.C. 7618 (a). HRM officers are responsible for:

(1) assisting WMC and Facility Directors in identifying suitable positions and in selecting, assigning, or appointing HPSP participants to such positions;

(2) monitoring HPSP participants selected for employment at their respective facilities to ensure completion of service obligation periods;

(3) ensuring a copy of the participant's *HPSP Agreement* (VA Form 10-0491F) is entered in the employee's official personnel folder;

(4) verifying an employee's status in HPSP as part of the employee clearance of station procedures;

(5) advising participants of their financial liability resulting from a voluntary personnel action, including resignation, retirement, change in occupation, change from title 38 or hybrid title 38 position to a title 5 position, and conversion to part-time status during the service obligation period. These actions constitute a breach of the participant's service obligation and HPSP Agreement; and

(6) reporting to WMC any participants who fail to complete their required service obligation periods.

g. **Participant/Employee.** Individuals selected for participation in HPSP are responsible for:

(1) reading, understanding, signing, and satisfying all requirements specified in the *HPSP Agreement* (VA Form 10-0491F) and Program Guide;

(2) maintaining enrollment, attendance, and an acceptable level of academic standing as defined by the school and program for which the scholarship was awarded;

(3) reporting educational progress and expenses to program officials;

(4) informing WMC immediately of any change impacting the terms of the agreement;

(5) ensuring prior to any change, that the change complies with program criteria. **NOTE:** *Changes may require approval or pre-approval from WMC. Thus, the participant should notify WMC in advance of the change whenever possible, but in all cases notification should occur within 10 days of the change unless otherwise specified;*

(6) ensuring that HPSP officials have access to educational or training institution official transcripts, and other information and documents required to assess the participant's academic standing, status, and progress;

(7) meeting or exceeding performance requirements for current VA position, if participant is a current VA employee;

(8) performing a clinical tour at a VA health care facility, as determined by VA, while enrolled in the course of education or training for which the scholarship is provided;

(9) submitting the final official transcript containing the degree conferral date from the academic institution attended to WMC within 90 days of completing the academic program;

(10) obtaining applicable credentials within 180 days after degree conferral and becoming eligible for assignment or appointment to the position for which the HPSP-sponsored education or training program prepared the participant;

(11) serving as a full-time VHA employee in position for which the HPSP-sponsored education or training program prepared the participant and in a location determined by VA; and

(12) maintaining program eligibility requirements throughout participation in the program.

## 5. REFERENCES

- a. Public Law 111-163, The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Service Act of 2010.
- b. Public Law 113-146, Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014.
- c. Title 38 Code of Federal Regulations 17.600 through 17.636.
- d. Title 38 United States Code 501, 512, 7401, 7421, 7601 through 7619, 7633, 7634 and 7636.